



A problem for the structural characterization of alternatives

Romoli, J. (Accepted/In press). A problem for the structural characterization of alternatives. *snippets*, 27.
<https://doi.org/10.7358/snip-2013-027-romo>

[Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal](#)

Published in:
snippets

Publication Status:
Accepted/In press: 01/10/2013

DOI:
[10.7358/snip-2013-027-romo](https://doi.org/10.7358/snip-2013-027-romo)

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

General rights
Copyright for the publications made accessible via Ulster University's Research Portal is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy
The Research Portal is Ulster University's institutional repository that provides access to Ulster's research outputs. Every effort has been made to ensure that content in the Research Portal does not infringe any person's rights, or applicable UK laws. If you discover content in the Research Portal that you believe breaches copyright or violates any law, please contact pure-support@ulster.ac.uk.

snippets

Issue 27

September 2013

Contents

1. Peter Arkadiev and Yury Lander. *Non-quantificational distributive quantifiers in Besleney Kabardian.*
2. Katharina Hartmann and Viola Schmitt. *Violations of the Right Edge Constraint in Right Node Raising.*
3. Giorgio Magri. *An argument for nominal lexical cumulativity.*
4. Emar Maier and Kees de Schepper. *Fake indexicals in Dutch: a counterexample to Kratzer 2009.*
5. Jacopo Romoli. *A problem for the structural characterization of alternatives.*
6. Philippe Schlenker and Gaurav Mathur. *A Strong Crossover effect in ASL.*
7. Hideaki Yamashita. *On (multiple) long-distance scrambling of adjuncts and subjects and the generalized additional scrambling effect.*



Fox and Katzir (2011) propose a principled characterization of alternatives for scalar implicatures based on structure. They define the notion of formal alternatives in (1), based on the notion of ‘being at most as complex as’ in (2), and that of ‘substitution source’ in (3).

- (1) **Formal alternatives:** given a sentence ϕ and a context C ,
 $A(\phi, C) = \{ \psi : \psi \text{ is derived from } \phi \text{ by replacing focused constituents } x_1, \dots, x_n \text{ with } y_1, \dots, y_n \text{ where } y_1 \lesssim_c x_1, \dots, y_n \lesssim_c x_n \}$
- (2) **Complexity:** $\phi \lesssim_c \psi$ if ϕ can be derived from ψ by successive substitutions of subconstituents of ψ with elements of the substitution source for ψ in C
- (3) **The substitution source:** the substitution source for X in a context C is the union of the following sets:
 - a. the Lexicon
 - b. the subconstituents of X
 - c. the set of salient constituents in C .

If we integrate this theory of alternatives with any theory of scalar implicatures which allows the exclusion of logically independent alternatives (e.g., Fox 2007 and Spector 2007), a problem arises with sentences like (4), in which a strong scalar term like *all* is embedded in the scope of a downward entailing operator like negation.

- (4) The committee didn’t pass all of my students.
- (4) gives rise to the inference in (6) and this is commonly derived as a scalar implicature by negating the alternative in (5).
- (5) The committee didn’t pass some (/any) of my students.
- (6) The committee passed some of my students.

Consider a representation for (4) where the focused constituent is at least as big as *didn’t pass all of my students*. According to the structural definition of alternatives, the alternatives that we obtain for (4) in that case are those in (7), where crucially the two without negation are subconstituents of the corresponding ones with negation.

- (7) {The committee didn’t pass all of my students, The committee didn’t pass some of my students, The committee passed all of my students, The committee passed some of my students}

The presence of the additional alternative identical to the scalar implicature in (6) renders the alternative in (5) non excludable (cf. Fox 2007), therefore no scalar implicature is predicted from (4).

Notice that while alternatives can be reduced contextually, it is not clear how a notion of relevance could distinguish between an alternative and its negation (cf. Chierchia et al. to appear). Notice, further, that (1) makes reference to focus constituents, therefore more precisely no scalar implicature is predicted to arise from a sentence like (4) if both negation and the scalar term are within the focus constituent. This prediction does not appear right, however. Consider (8-b), in which the focus constituent is presumably the entire sentence given the question in (8-a) (e.g., Rooth 1992). In this case the alternatives are going to either include both (5) and (6) or neither of them, either way the scalar implicature in (6) is not predicted in this case. Nonetheless intuitively it appears as strong as in other cases.

- (8) a. You look disappointed. What's up?
 b. [The committee didn't pass all of my students]_F

References

- Chierchia, G., D. Fox, and B. Spector (to appear) "The grammatical view of scalar implicatures and the relationship between semantics and pragmatics," in *Semantics: An International Handbook of Natural Language Meaning*, Volume 3, ed. C. Maienborn, K. von Stechow and P. Portner. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Fox, D. (2007) "Free choice and the theory of scalar implicatures," in *Presupposition and Implicature in Compositional Semantics*, ed. U. Sauerland and P. Stateva. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 71–120.
- Fox, D. and R. Katzir (2011) "On the characterization of alternatives," *Natural Language Semantics* 19(1), 87–107.
- Rooth, M. (1992) "A theory of focus interpretation," *Natural Language Semantics* 1(1), 117–121.
- Spector, B. (2007) "Aspects of the pragmatics of plural morphology: On higher-order implicatures," in *Presupposition and Implicature in Compositional Semantics*, ed. U. Sauerland and P. Stateva. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.